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THE PAST OF CENTRAL EUROPE IS THE FUTURE OF EUROPE, AN INTERVIEW WITH ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

Interview with Zygmunt Bauman conducted by Igor Stiks

How do you see the direction of contemporary transformations of modern citizenship?

Bauman: The concept used in the West is that of the “nation-state”, not a “national state”; instead of conveying the idea of the state by one nation from among a multi-national population, it suggests that “nation” and “state” are two aspects of the same entity: that a nation is unimaginable without a state and a state is unimaginable without a nation. A modern state needs a “nation” to “legitimise” itself, justify its demands for obedience from its citizens by invocation of a common past and shared destiny – whereas a “nation” needs the coercive power of the state to make its unity (“sharing”) real – to replace the multitude of local traditions or dialects with one history, one language. With the emergence of the modern state, the trinity of nation, state and territory has been established as the seat and holder of sovereignty.

Today, as a result of globalisation, we are witnessing the gradual yet steady erosion and emaciation of that nation-state-based territorial sovereignty. No one state, however rich and militarily strong, can now claim full and undivided sovereignty on its territory. No one can “do it alone”, we are all dependant on each other and cannot do anything without taking into account the actions and reactions of people who are far, far beyond the reach of our local - national - powers. And after a couple of centuries of nation-state building, the time of *diasporization* has arrived...

Diaspora politics are becoming increasingly important in today's world. How would you see this sort of, as Benedict Anderson put it, 'long distance nationalism' on the one hand and, on the other, the attempts by the 'sending' states to control their diasporas in 'receiving' states where we also witness the rise of intolerance and right-wing populism? All these processes are intrinsically linked to citizenship policies.

Bauman: Yes, every process has its discontents, and diasporization is no exception. Denmark or the Netherlands, until recently symbols of openness and hospitality, turned into pioneers of barring immigration and reintroduced boundary control. And yet such resistance to diasporization may well be a lost battle. According to demographic predictions, by 2050 Europe will lose eighty million inhabitants by comparison with its present population. There will be eighty million less Europeans, if immigration does not continue – something that the European economy would hardly bear. Business interests would not allow governments to really stop the immigration, as politicians promise their electors: the alternative to immigration would be to move their own industrial plants elsewhere, where labour force is cheaper and more docile. Fundamentalism, xenophobia, boundary closing are in the long run unrealistic; just playing to the nebulous dream of making the ever more complex world simpler, and reducing the multitude of heterogeneous problems such complexity brings forth by getting rid of one, blamed for other challenges and the fears they arouse in people exposed to uncertainty and insecurity.

Raymond Aron explained the emergence and the nature of modern anti-Semitism by the coincidence of the Jewish emancipation from the ghetto and the social turbulence caused by modernization. Jews were always present in France but separated and hidden most of the time beyond the ghetto walls – not the next door neighbours living in the street where your kids played, sending their children to the same school you sent your children: in short they might have been in physical proximity but were spiritually, socially, infinitely far away and suddenly; having been “emancipated” by Napoleon’s edicts, they suddenly appeared on the streets, bought or rented flats in the same buildings where you lived, sent their children to the same schools, aspired to the same jobs... All that happened at the time when the unstoppable process of modernization took off; and modernisation means breaking traditions, enforcing new habits and routines, new needs and new tasks... In short, it means permanent uncertainty and acute anxiety – turmoil replacing old order. This may be exhilarating, opening new horizons and opportunities, but at the same time a prolific source of nightmares, and a humiliating sense of one’s own ignorance, impotence, inadequacy and haplessness. It was tempting and easy to put the two things together: when there were no Jews around everything was orderly, quiet, one knew exactly what to expect tomorrow, what needed to be done and how one should live to avoid trouble. Now one sees Jews in the streets and workplaces and all the certainties vanished and everything goes topsy-turvy. A quite similar “popular logic” is at work today in the case of the influx of immigrants: pinning the cause of the new set of frightening disturbances set in motion by globalization on the appearance of people who were not visible before.

At that time we also had the birth of modern citizenship, with its promise of equality for all citizens in the state that is supposed to watch carefully over their legal equality, and later on, maybe even their social equality. And then the promise was broken throughout the twentieth century, even in republican countries such as France, especially the Jews were excluded and targeted as well as some other minority groups. In Eastern Europe and within the Balkans throughout that time we had a different concept of state and citizenship.

Bauman: Yes, but what made the idea of citizenship such an inflammatory phenomenon was its connection, in fact identification, with the question of national identity. If you say this is a French nation and French state it is one thing, but if we say that it’s a state of Frenchmen, that is a source of trouble. Frenchmen have the right to be here and all the others are not welcome, they are strangers in our midst. Claude Levi-Strauss said that there were only two ways of dealing with the presence of difference, one was *anthropophagic* and the other *anthropoemic*. The anthropophagic strategy consists of “devouring” and “digesting” the stranger, transforming thereby an alien substance body into a cell of one’s own organism. In short, in “assimilation”: renouncing whatever distinguishes you from the “genuine stuff”. If you want to be a French citizen you have to become a Frenchman in your behaviour, your language, the way you act, your ideas, preferences and values. The other strategy, anthropoemic, means exactly the opposite: rejecting – “vomiting”, incarcerating people in camps or ghettos, or rounding them up, packing them back into a boat or into a plane and sending them back “where they came from”. None of the two strategies are truly “working” in our globalised world. Assimilation makes sense as long as people believe (or are powerless to contradict such a belief imposed by the dominant power on the rest of the world) in a clear hierarchy – superiority and inferiority - of cultures, and one direction of progressive evolution – from “inferior” to “superior”... In our multi-centred world however few people are daring, adventurous or arrogant enough to maintain that there is a cultural hierarchy and to enforce

such an idea upon reality. Look at Germany. People of Turkish origin consider themselves fully legitimate and loyal German citizens but they don't see why they should therefore stop being Turks. Why should they abandon their Turkish identity? Turkish cultural tradition is no shorter than Germany's, it's as old and venerable, why should they abandon it? The identification of national culture with state citizenship is a recipe for trouble: explosive, inflammatory.

The alternative approach was experimented with by the Austro-Hungary monarchy: dismantling the trinity of nation-state-territory, and so also disentangling national/cultural identity from the question of citizenship. Wherever you happened to live in Austria-Hungary, and whether you were Slovenian, Croat, Slovak, Polish, Czech, or a Jew, you had schools which gave you the possibility to be brought up and educated in your own language, as well as ethnic and religious autonomy; you didn't have to abandon your identity as a condition to be granted the state citizenship. And all roads were open to you, including the offices of the state. It seems that the prototype of the opposition between the phagic/emic stance on the one hand, and the Austro-Hungarian practice on the other, was provided by the monotheism vs. polytheism opposition, or Jerusalem vs. Athens or Rome... In monotheism, there is and can be but one god, all other gods being false pretenders; and it is a mortal sin to venerate more than one god. In polytheism, mutual tolerance between gods is the rule. Whenever Rome conquered a new territory, not only its residents were granted Roman citizenship, but the statues of their local gods were added to the imperial Pantheon. The frame of thought behind such a strategy was kept alive through part of the modern era in parts of Central Europe which stayed away from the west-European religious wars, nation-state building and Westphalian settlement. One can suppose today that the past of Central Europe is the future of an increasingly diasporic Europe...

Indeed, back in 1992 there was a promise of European citizenship. Today it seems to be in crisis with the problems of Schengen, the eurozone, with the lack of solidarity among European states. How do you see the institution of European citizenship and does it have a future?

Bauman: I'm not a counsellor to politicians, I don't know how and if the present confusion will be resolved. But I believe that the progressive integration of Europe is an essentially unstoppable process. There will be of course many hiccups, steps forward, and steps back – and at the moment the steps are mostly back from forward-looking developments like Schengen. That's an understandable reaction, as I said before, to the recent collapse of confidence, but it is unlikely to continue forever as the facts of the matter become clearer and are accepted. I repeat: we all depend on each other. We can't really opt out from the integration process; we are bound to stay together. The only question is how much time this process will require, and how many and how big and hurtful the collateral damage done in the meantime will be. Will there be a European citizenship? It is, to be sure, a question of which passport officers issue the papers... For the member countries of the Schengen agreement it no longer matters who and in which city issued your passport; in practice, all residents of those countries are European citizens as they can live in any country of their choice, work in every country of Europe of their choice, or even partake in the elections to the authorities of their chosen locality. "European identity" however is a different matter.

I think it is one of the merits of Europe that it does not promote one model Europeans are obliged to adopt. On the contrary - Europe thrives on the very diversity of its population, on diversity of ideals, customs, traditions, cultures... This is precisely the secret of the unique European creativity. In Europe “stranger” was always within sight and reach, passing ten miles one could find a different culture, a different language and very often quite different form of life. That was the greatness of Europe, and probably Europe’s major contribution to the fast globalizing and “diasporized” planet. Unanimity, consensus, is not the objective by which the quality of our cohabitation will be measured.

There are twenty odd members of the European Union, there are twenty odd treasures of national history and hoards of national experience, but we are still unable to avail ourselves of that wealth in full, as each of them is wrapped in its own idiom impenetrable to the rest of us. Doing nothing to rectify that situation is perhaps the most unfortunate among the neglects of the promoters of European integration. I believe that what the European Union should be busy doing is the opening up of those national treasures to all Europeans – starting with translating the masterpieces of all national cultures into the languages of all European nations. Our variety is our greatest chance. Let’s make sure we don’t miss it!